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FUTURE OF FUR SUPPLY
DEPENDS UPON WISE LAWS

The remnants of natural fur stocks in the United States are fast dwindling. The fur supply, once a rich heritage and a prime stimulus for the occupation and settlement of the continent, is seriously threatened by present conditions of lack of uniformity in laws and regulations relating to open seasons, trapping methods, and primeness of pelts. To remedy the unwholesome conditions as far as possible, and before it is too late, the Biological Survey of the United States Department of Agriculture is cooperating with State conservation and game commissions in encouraging the enactment of uniform trapping laws in zones having similar climatic conditions.

Furs of many kinds were commonly taken in all sections of the country a few generations ago, but with the depletion or extinction over great areas of certain of the more prized species, the most valuable fur bearers in the United States, from the standpoint of financial returns from the annual catch, are now the muskrat, the skunk, the raccoon, and the opossum. Studies are made of the needs of these and of all other fur animals with a view to ascertaining the status of each species before recommending legislation for or against it.

Fur animals are the sole basis of the fur trade, one of the oldest and still one of the most important industries of the world. They constitute a valuable natural resource, which should be perpetuated, for if once exterminated a species can never again be brought back. Fortunately thus far

extermination has been only local, and with proper protection of the dwindling stocks, especially by restocking depleted areas and rearing fur bearers in captivity -- that is, by fur farming -- it can be hoped to continue the fur supply to meet the demands of the present and future generations.

Fur bearing animals should not be classed as game, for they are trapped primarily for fur and not for food. Further, they should not be shot or gassed, for bullet and gas holes damage the pelts and thus lessen their value on the market.

Three months is a sufficiently long open season for any fur-bearing animal, according to the Biological Survey, and the bureau is recommending legislation to this end. It is also urging that trappers be required to make annual reports of the number of each species taken, for with data thus made available a sound foundation will be provided for a survey of the annual catch and its relation to the breeding supply, or, as it may be termed, the capital stock. It is upon such surveys that protective measures should be based, for an intelligent estimate of the fur resources of a State will greatly simplify the framing of beneficial legislation. The trapping license, aside from its revenue producing possibilities, affords the best known means for the registration and identification of trappers, and its renewal from year to year should be conditioned upon the filing of satisfactory returns on the previous season's catch.

In urging the importance of proper legislation on fur animals the Biological Survey points out that what is needed is not more laws but better laws and a stricter enforcement of them. Laws relating to fur species should be uniform throughout a State, so that every section may be equally affected.

To frame fur legislation requires an open-minded approach to the subject, without bias or influence by one interest at the expense of another. The trapper of fur animals should receive the same consideration given to the hunter of game animals or birds.

Among the important features urged for consideration in the enactment of laws are that open seasons should be prescribed for the time when fur is prime and not during the breeding or hibernation periods. A close season should be placed on any animal in danger of extinction. Molesting the nests or dens of fur animals should be prohibited and the use of chemical or mechanical means in driving fur animals from dens should be discouraged in every way, chiefly by continuing the close season over the hibernation period.

The greatest degree of cooperation and foresight on the part of everyone is essential if all species of fur bearers are to be retained permanently and the fur industry is not to be jeopardized. As wide a dissemination as possible by State game officials, State departments of agriculture, and State universities of information concerning fur-animal conservation will help bring about intelligent cooperation and a healthy sentiment on the part of all concerned in enacting proper laws for preserving this important natural resource.